

Winning

Story by SGT W. Cullen James

Hearts

Photos by SGT Vernell Hall



and Minds



CIVIL-affairs soldiers throughout Afghanistan are working hard through various community projects to win the trust of the Afghan people.

Winning hearts and minds is their mission, and over the course of seven months soldiers of Team A, 403rd Civil Affairs Battalion, at Asadabad Fire Base have completed several projects that support that goal. These projects have included distribution of humanitarian-aid items, digging a well at a boys school, laying an irrigation pipeline, covering the rock and mortar walls at a girls school with concrete, putting in latrines for the same school, plus many other projects.

“... we’re improving life for the people here, and that’s good for America.”

Although CA soldiers assist the Afghans in getting projects started, the work is done by Afghans. They are empowered by CA through funding and supplies.

“They’ve done a nice job,” said MAJ Timothy Connors, officer in charge of Team A. “We’re real happy with them, but the big thing is whether

SGTs W. Cullen James and Vernell Hall are with the 11th Public Affairs Detachment in Afghanistan.

- ▶ Members of the 403rd Civil Affairs Battalion unload humanitarian daily rations that will help feed the Afghan people at their new locations.
- ▶ Soldiers unload construction equipment that will be used to build homes for Afghans who had to relocate because of a flood in Parwan Province.



The 403rd’s MAJ Mark Cepiel talks to village leaders about what the CA unit is doing to aid local Afghans.

they’re happy, and I think they are,” Connors said.

Once a project is started, the soldiers check back every week to assess the progress. The Caramal Girls School in Asadabad is one place where they have focused. They’ve replaced all the windows, put down carpeting and had the school painted.

“It’s good to just check on the work and make sure the principal is happy,” Connors said. “And they’re really happy with the improvements.”

Several schools in the area surrounding Asadabad have benefited from CA assistance.

“We’ve done a lot of projects like Caramal, where they have buildings but they need some work,” Connor said. “Whether replacing a roof or windows, there’s plenty of work to do.”

“It can be frustrating at times,





A soldier unloads blankets to aid Afghans displaced by the flood in Parwan Province.

because the progress can be slow, but it is rewarding,” said SGT Mark Watson, a Team A member.

Connors stressed that his team is working within specific guidelines.

“There’s a misconception among some people that we’re here to reconstruct the country,” he said.

“We’re not really capable of doing that. Our job is to support the maneuver forces. Whether that payoff is in force protection or elsewhere, we do a lot of work in villages around the base trying to win support.”

“We also do work where the maneuver forces want to focus their operations,” said Connors. “The end result is to make it harder for bad guys to operate in certain areas.

“We work to maintain a good

These projects have included distribution of humanitarian-aid items, digging a well at a boys school, placing an irrigation pipeline, laying concrete coverage for rock and mortar walls at a girls school, and putting in latrines for the same school, plus many other projects.

relationship with the Afghan people so they’re willing to support our mission. We’re not going willy-nilly about the country doing work; we’re doing it for a reason,” he said.

Connors added that although the end result of their work is to assist U.S. and coalition forces, it is good that they can help the Afghan people at the same time.

“I’m happy the people are getting back on their feet, but I am more satisfied when I see the results of our work with respect to our forces here. That’s what it’s all about — we’re here to make the job of the maneuver commander easier,” Connors said. “In the process we’re improving life for the people here, and that’s good for America.” 🇺🇸